Characters

- SETSUKO BANKS
- HIMIKO HAMILTON
- CHIZUYE JUAREZ
- TERUKO MACKENZIE
- ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Time and Place: 1968. The home of Himiko Hamilton in Junction City, Kansas, and an obscure netherworld where time moves at will.

SETTING: The stark set includes both a representation of the netherworld (in which time is elastic and the spirit can journey) and a representation of the home of Himiko. The home is a combination of 1960s Americana and things Japanese, including a raised area that abstractly comprises a Japanese tatami room bordered by linoleum. In the room are a pile of zabuton (flat Japanese sitting cushions), an antique, round-hooded trunk overflowing with Japanese cloth materials, kimono, and so forth, and an oval, red lacquer tea table. The reality is distressed.

This play is to be performed without an intermission. Average running time is between eighty and ninety minutes.

DRAMATIST'S NOTES: This play is based on the virtually undocumented historical fact of communities of Japanese "war brides" who have lived in Kansas over the last twenty to forty years. More than 100,000 native Japanese women married American servicemen during the American Occupation of Japan. These families returned to the United States between the years of 1946 and 1960. Depending on the time of their return, any American servicemen married to "Oriental" women were required under that army's resettlement policies to be stationed at remote forts, such as Fort Riley, Kansas. Hence, in an area of Kansas known mostly for German and Irish American Protestants and agriculture, there came to exist dispersed communities of Japanese women and their multiracial, multicultural children. This background and my family history catalyzed this play, in addition to extensive interviews with fifty Japanese women residing in Kansas who were international brides.

Prologue

PRELUDE Invitation to Tea

In the darkness, an unaccented, female American voice belts out "The Star Spangled Banner." A traditional Japanese melody — perhaps "Sakura" — cuts into the song's end as lights fade in slowly tohalf to suggest a netherworld. Himiko kneels downstage center. She is a pale, delicately boned woman wearing a feminine but mysterious dress over which is a kimono of distorted colors. The dress is long and muted in tone; its skirt, short in front, trails the floor in back and the outer hems are ragged. In its little-girlishness and antiquity, the dress suggests a different era. A white petticoat hangs underneath it, its shredded edges peeking out. Quiet, traditional Japanese music haunts the background. Crumpled like paper, Himiko rises gradually, relating to a presence that we cannot see. She is beautiful, but beaten, and exudes an aura of sultry mystery. There is no lunacy in this woman, rather the sense of one who has been pushed to the edge, tried desperately to hold on, and failed. She is, indeed, resolute. Himiko reaches out to the presence and speaks in a voice that carries the weight of the world, moving from a hoarse whisper to a more audible tone.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Billy. Can't you see it's me? Himiko Hamilton. You gave me your name and, this day, I give it back. You have forsaken my spirit and it is left shaking in the cold mist left behind by your restless breath. As you walk. Fast. And always away. Leaving me to wander between two worlds forever.

(*a quiet smile appears*)

But listen, Billy, listen. I have learned your Christian prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray your Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake. I pray your Lord my soul to take."

Himiko's attention is suddenly drawn to another presence which absolutely delights her; she moves toward it slightly.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Mieko-chan? This is your mother. Come close. Let me smell the confusion of your Amerasian skin. For you are the only gift I ever had. Beautiful half-Japanese girl, fill the holes in my kimono sleeves with your soft laughter. Lead me to peace.

Himiko removes a pistol from her kimono sleeve, bows as she offers it to time and space, and places it before her. She kneels and looks again toward her vision of Mieko.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Mieko, my child.

(*She looks in the opposite direction*.)

Billy, my beloved husband.

(*She looks down stage center, her voice louder, but not too loud*)

Mother? Can you hear me? Wait for me, Mother. I am coming to have tea with thee.

Himiko lifts the pistol and aims it toward her throat. Blackout as a gunshot followed by a deafening atomiclike explosion fills the theater, leaving behind trails of smoke. Half light up as, from various dark corners, Teruko, Atsuko, Chiz and Setsuko enter one by one and take staggered positions. Spotlights simultaneously fade in onthe women who bow as they speak their first lines. The style of the bows reflects their personalities.

SETSUKO BANKS

Shall we have tea at three?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Please come over for tea.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Join me for tea, just the two of us.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Tea. *O-cha*. That's our word for it.

SETSUKO BANKS

I drink it hot in a pretty Japanese cup.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I like it cool. Any cup will do.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Lukewarm in a fancy Japanese cup.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Very hot. In a simple cup.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Tea is not quiet.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

But turbulent.

SETSUKO BANKS

Tremblings.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

So fine you can't see them.

SETSUKO BANKS

So dense it seems to be standing still.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

We Japanese women drink a lot of it.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Become it.

SETSUKO BANKS

Swallow the tempest.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

And nobody knows.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

The storm inside.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Ever.

SETSUKO BANKS

We remain. . .

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Peaceful.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Contained.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

The eye of the hurricane.

SETSUKO BANKS

But if you can taste the tea.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

If it can roll over your tongue in one swallow.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Then the rest will come to you.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

When the tea leaves are left behind in the bottom of a cup.

(*Himiko reenters carrying Rayban sunglasses and a long, blonde wig; she comes upstage center*.)

HIMIKO HAMILTON

When we are long gone and forgotten.

(*puts on the sunglasses and holds out her arms in welcome to the audience as the other women exit*.)

Come,. . .it is time for tea.

(*Himiko pulls on the wig, crossfade to the tatami room*.)

Act 1

Act 1, Scene 1: The Art of Tea

SCENEONE The Art of Tea

Atsuko and Teruko drift to the tatami room where piles of books and a wild-looking wig are on the floor. They take off their shoes outside of the room and enter. Atsuko has brought her own booties and puts them on. She removes her sweater, and studies the room with mixed feelings of revulsion and attraction, as if she has vicariously imagined this room's experiences. She sniffs the air with displeasure, and covers her nose and mouth with a handkerchief. They set up the Japanese-style table and place four zabuton as Himiko observes from the darkness. Whenever Himiko speaks to the audience, it is as if she is on trial and offering a matter-of-fact defense.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Ugh. How were you able to have tea here with this stench!

(*studies the floor*)

Maybe we should keep our shoes on.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

It didn't smell here before, Atsuko-san!

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Yes, it did. You said it did.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I said it smelled like liquor and burnt candles.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, you know that's from bringing home men and making sex.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*insistently protective*)

Before her husband died, Himiko lived a quiet life.

Atsuko picks up the wild wig as if to negate Teruko's statement. Teruko starts to exit to the kitchen.

I'm going to find the teapot and cups.

Atsuko hurriedly drops the wig and looks around the room as if she has seen or suspects ghosts.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Don't leave me alone!

TERUKO MAKENZIE

We must begin.

(*Teruko exits to kitchen*.)

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*to audience*)

Yes, we must begin. . .Tea for the soul; tea to cleanse the spirit.

Atsuko examines the room carefully as if afraid of getting dirty and begins to put things away. She puts on her glasses.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Himiko was so wild after her husband died. Maybe she was like that in Japan, too. I don't know how she passed the screening tests for army brides. They took so long and the Yankee officers asked so many stupid questions.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*addresses Atsuko as if echoing a reminder, encircling her as she speaks*)

"Are you a Communist? Why do you want to marry this man instead of one of your own native Japanese? Do you think moving to America will afford you personal financial gain? Are you suffering from insanity? Are you an imbecile or idiot?"

(*a beat*)

"Are you now — or have you ever been — a prostitute?"

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

The nerve of that Amerikan Army! Did the army ask you if you were a prostitute?

Teruko returns with a teapot, cups, lacquer coasters, and two cloths — one wet and one dry — all on a lacquer tray. She handles them delicately.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yes. I told them we weren't all bad girls just because we fell in love with Amerikans.

(*looks around the room as if drinking in Himiko's life*)

Poor Himiko.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Where is Setsuko Banks? I thought she was the one most friendly with Himiko.

(*looks around the room eerily*)

I heard the tatami was covered with blood. It's funny, isn't it, how one moment someone is full of life and the next, they are ashes.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Atsuko-san, ne, if you're that uncomfortable, go home. Setsuko and Chiz

(*pronounced like "cheese"*)

and I can take care of this.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

As head of our Buddhist chapter, how would it look to headquarters if I didn't do everything I could to help a member?

(*feigning an innocent smile, she peers over her glasses*)

Besides, I wanted to see the inside of this house.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Well, Setsuko-san went home to pick up o-sushi.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

And "Chiz" is always late. Her nickname sounds so stupid. Like food. She even wears pants now and grows her hair long like a hippy.

(*removes a crocheted green-and-purple poodle toilet paper cover from the trunk and shakes her head at its oddity*)

She's just as silly as Himiko was.

Atsuko takes out her own tea cup, admires it, and places it on the table. Teruko wipes Himiko's tea cups, first with a wet cloth and then a dry one. She carefully arranges the cups with coasters and teapot on the table. Atsuko moves Himiko's tea cups away from her own.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*removes a folded newspaper article from her wallet; reads from it with officiousness*)

Listen. I cut this out. "Death Notices. September 9, 1968. Himiko Hamilton, thirty-nine, widow of Chief Warrant Officer William Hamilton, passed away in her home from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. She was preceded in death by her husband and, recently, her daughter, Mieko, eighteen. A Japanese war bride, Mrs˙ Hamilton was a resident of Junction City for twenty years. She leaves no survivors."

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*to audience with quiet dignity*)

But, still, I ask you to listen. Please.

(*a beat*)

I am suspended between two worlds. There is no harmony here

(*indicates the women in tatami room*)

nor here

(*indicates her soul*).

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Well, she *did* leave survivors.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Who?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Us.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Not me! Just because I'm Japanese doesn't mean I have anything to do with her life. Dead is dead, Teruko-san, so what difference does it make? Who knows, ne. Maybe next it will be me. Do you think the Japanese women in this town are going to pray for my soul just because I happen to come from Japan?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*shocked at Atsuko's callousness*)

Atsuko-san. We must respect the dead.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Only because they no longer have to fear the darkness. The rest of us must wait, without any idea of when our time will come to an end.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*as if she feels Himiko's presence*)

No, sometimes even the dead must wait. In limbo.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*a smile*)

Well, Himiko should wait forever after what she did to her husband.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

But you know what he was doing to her.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Nobody really knows.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Nobody would listen.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Maybe she wasn't a good wife.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I was the *best* wife.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

He never let her out of the house and hardly let her have guests. Remember during the big snow storm? The phone lines were down and —

HIMIKO HAMILTON

— I didn't have any tea or rice left. Billy had gone to Oklahoma to visit his family. He said, "Don't leave the house" and took my daughter, Mieko, with him. So there I was, starving to death, standing behind —

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*overlapping with Himiko's last two words*)

— Standing behind the frosty glass. She looked like she was made of wax.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*smiles at herself*)

I asked him once. I said, "Why did you marry me?" And he said he wanted a good maid, for free.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Maybe she wanted too much.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I never asked for anything. Except soy sauce and good rice. And dreams. . .for Mieko.

Himiko glows with love for her child, turns around, and seems to see her as a tot, and beckons to her.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Mieko-chan! My little girl!

(*Himiko exits as if chasing "Mieko."*)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Teruko, I saw your daughter last week. She looks Japanese.

(*a compliment*)

That's nice. Too bad she isn't friends with my girl. My girl's always with Setsuko-san's daughter. Have you seen her? Looks Indonesian, not Japanese at all. Shame, ne.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

But Setsuko's daughter is the only one who cooks Japanese food. My daughter likes hamburger sandwich and yellow-haired boys.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

My daughter always goes to Setsuko-san's house. I've never been invited.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Setsuko likes her privacy.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She invited you to tea.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Well, if you're not willing to be genuine with her, how can you share the honor of tea together?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She invited Himiko, too!

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yes, even after the incident. Even though everyone was afraid.

A siren wails as a deafening gunshot echoes in the air and all lights black out. Atsuko and Teruko exit to the kitchen in the darkness. Himiko, without sunglasses, drifts from the darkness and stops center stage. The siren fades out and a spotlight fades up immediately on Himiko who crouches as if shooting a pistol. She smiles and rises gracefully. She speaks matter-of-factly to the audience.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*imitates the sound of shots, pronounced "bahn" like in bonfire*)

Ban! Ban! Ban! Yes. I am Himiko Hamilton. The murderess. I married and murdered a gentleman from Oklahoma. And they let me go on self-defense. It took one shot — right through the heart I never knew he had. Now that he's gone, I can speak freely. Please listen. I wasted my life in Kansas. The state — of mind. Not Kansas City, but *Junction City*, a stupid hick town that rests like a pimple on an army base called Fort Riley. Where the army's resettlement policy exiled our husbands because they were married to "Japs."

Himiko indicates her own face as Chiz and Setsuko enter from opposite corners carrying food in a basket and furoshiki, respectively.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

They won't tell you that because they're real *Japaneezy* Japanese.

Chiz and Setsuko smile and bow formally to each other in greeting; Setsuko bows a second time.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

See what I mean? Well,. . .I'm about as Japanese as corn flakes, or so they say, and I killed my husband because he laughed at my soy sauce just one time too many.

Himiko smiles whimsically and turns away from the audience. Chiz and Setsuko drift down stage. They are unaware of Himiko's presence. Setsuko and Chiz stand outside of the house.

SETSUKO BANKS

Oh, Chizuye-san, I wish Himiko-san could have seen all the Japanese women at her funeral.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*to the audience*)

All the Japanese women who were too ashamed to say hello to me in public because I was "no good."

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*adamant with characteristic exuberance*)

Ever since she shot her husband two years ago, she's kind of haunted me. It made me remember that underneath my comfortable American clothes, I am, after all, Japanese.

(*a quick smile*)

But don't tell anybody.

SETSUKO BANKS

Well, after all, you were the one who went looking for her.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Someone had to. The rest of you were too afraid of what you would find.

(*looks into space as she recalls*)

I forced her door open and, there she was, paler and bluer than the sky over Hiroshima that strange August. She had pulled her kimono over her American dress, as if it might make her journey into the next life a little easier. But I took one look at her and I knew nothing was ever going to be easy for her, not in life or in death.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I would have given anything to have tea with Japanese girls. I drank alone.

Setsuko and Chiz approach the house and remove their shoes. Setsuko straightens hers and Chiz's.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

What'd you bring?

SETSUKO BANKS

Maki-zushi.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*smiles to poke fun at her friend*)

Figures. I brought spinach quiche, Sue.

SETSUKO BANKS

My name is not Sue. My name is Setsuko. Chizuye-san, I tell you many times not to call me by this nickname you made up.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

But it's easier.

SETSUKO BANKS

Like "Chiz."

(*pronounces it "cheese"*)

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*laughs; pronounces it with a short "i"*)

No, Setsuko, like "Chiz." That's what my customers at my restaurant call me, but you can call me anything you like.

They enter the house and Chiz looks toward the kitchen.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Hello? Hello? Ah, Teruko! Hello.

Teruko appears from the kitchen with food, including fruit. Setsuko scurries to help her.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Hello! Hello! Look, Atsuko-san is here, too.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*much surprise and a touch of contempt*)

Atsuko?!

SETSUKO BANKS

Well, what an unexpected pleasure.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Setsuko-san! I rarely see you, but you look younger every time I do. I was sorry to hear about your husband.

SETSUKO BANKS

Yes, well, it was his time to. . .to move on.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Negroes don't live very long. The food they eat, you know.

SETSUKO BANKS

My husband ate almost entirely Japanese food.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Atsuko-san's husband hates Japanese food.

(*giggles*)

And he's Japanese Amerikan!

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

He does *not* hate Japanese food!

(*to Setsuko and Chiz*)

Why are you both so late? We cleaned the kitchen already. And, of course, we must have tea.

SETSUKO BANKS

Oh, yes, tea sounds very good to me now.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Why, yes. Everything must start with tea.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*laughs*)

Tea is *just* a drink.

SETSUKO BANKS

Oh, it's much more than that.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I couldn't live without tea.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Yes,. . .it brings everything into balance.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I think it improves my eyesight.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*laughing*)

And my insight.

Teruko, Setsuko and Atsuko have a good laugh over this as Chiz looks on dead-pan. Finally she smiles and lights up a cigarette.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Hey, enough about tea. Who else is coming?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

More than four would be too many. I stopped asking for volunteers after Atsuko-san spoke up.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

How many were there?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

At least fifty Japanese women!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Fifty? Jesus. You'd think it was a blue-light special.

SETSUKO BANKS

Chizuye-san! Shame, ne! After all, this is a difficult occasion for us: the first time a member of our Japanese community has passed on.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

What "community"?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*again, to audience*)

Yes, what community? We knew each other, but not really . . . We didn't care enough to know.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Who's got time to chit-chat, right, "Ats"?

(*pronounced with a short "a," like "ahts"*)

Now that I'm finally having tea with the great Atsuko Yamamoto, you get a nickname.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Thank you, but you can keep your . . . gift.

(*a beat*)

It's obvious we're all from different neighborhoods.

SETSUKO BANKS

But we are all army wives — and we are all Japanese.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

So what? That won't buy us a ticket to Nirvana. Let's face it, girls, after we get through dealing with our jobs and our families, we're ready to go to sleep. And, if any of us are willing to drive across town and have tea, we don't even talk about what's really on our minds — whether coming to Amerika was such a good idea.

(*she smiles*)

Countries last; love is mortal.

SETSUKO BANKS

But we're here today because we're Japanese.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

We're here today because we're scared.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Scared they will be next to die or their souls will be left in limbo like mine.

Atsuko can hardly contain her excitement at finally being able to ask a question she's pondered for years:

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Tell us, Satsuko-san. Is it true about Himiko being a dance hall girl in Japan?

SETSUKO BANKS

If that's what she said. I never really knew her until after her husband died. I would see her walking in the middle of a humid summer day in a heavy coat and the yellow-haired wig.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*reliving that day*)

"Hello. I am Mrs˙ William Hamilton. May I have a glass of water? Oh, thank you, thank you. You are so kind."

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*gesticulating that Himiko was crazy*)

Kichigai, ne . . .

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

She was *not* crazy.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

It is the Japanese way to carry everything inside.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Yes. And that is where I hid myself.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She came from Japan, but the way she dressed, the way she walked. Mah, I remember the district church meeting. She came in a low-cut dress and that yellow-haired wig,

(*mocks how she thinks a Korean walks*)

walking like a Korean.

SETSUKO BANKS

Atsuko-san, ne, we have something in common with all the Oriental women here, even the Vietnamese. We all left behind our countries to come and live here with the men we loved.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Okay, okay. It's not that I didn't like Himiko-san. So many things she did were not acceptable. If she acted like that in Japan, people would think she was . . . well, a prostitute. Something was not right inside her head. I mean, whoever heard of a Japanese shooting her husband with a rifle? I told you that day at the cemetery.

Himiko, having had enough, rushes forward and the women freeze.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*defiantly calls them back into the past with a roll call, stamping her foot as she calls out each name*)

Teruko. Setsuko. Atsuko. Chizuye.

Himiko exits through the kitchen as the music for "Taps" sets the mood. The women drift from the house as if answering the roll call. The lights fade out on house and fade up downstage. They stand as if around a headstone at a cemetery as Himiko enters. A black-veiledhat, black coat, and black pumps complete her widow ensemble. She carries a black bag out of which she pulls a can of beer. The women watch in shock as Himiko opens the beer and pours it over the "grave" by which they stand. Setsuko runs to her and takes the beer.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Mah, there must be a thousand graves here!

SETSUKO BANKS

Shame on you, Himiko-san! Pouring beer on your husband's grave!

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I am celebrating. First Memorial Day since he "left me." He liked beer when he was alive. Why shouldn't he like it when he's dead.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Sounds pretty fair to me.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Teruko-san, come. We've seen enough.

Atsuko pulls away a reluctant Teruko who beckons to Chiz. All three exit. Setsuko, concerned, lingers as Himiko suddenly looks up at an invisible object in great shock.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I'm sorry, Billy. That's right. I forgot. You like Budweiser beer. This is cheap kind, brand X. See?

(*points at the can*)

Just B-E-E-R. Billy, what are you doing here? I believe in reincarnation, but this is a little soon. I planned on being gone before you came back. I'm sorry I didn't bury you in your favorite shirt. I couldn't fix the hole in it from when I shot you. No, no. I don't want to go with you

(*fighting*)

No, I want to stay here with our daughter. She's not mad at me for what I did. She says you deserved it. No, I don't want to be alone with you anymore. I don't want to kiss and make up.

(*pushes away an unseen presence*)

Setchan! Help me! Billy's going to take me away.

(*the presence knocks her off her feet*)

SETSUKO BANKS

(*an antithetical picture of solitude, she draws near*)

Himiko-san. Let's go home now. We'll make tea and talk.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Help me, Setchan. He's going to beat me up again.

SETSUKO BANKS

Come, Himi-chan. You must go home and rest.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

There is only unrest. It is like the war never ended.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*sympathetically*)

Oh, Himi-san.

(*not knowing what else to do, she releases Himiko and bows her head sorrowfully*)

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*enervated, to herself*)

I wish I would have died in World War II. It was an easier war than this one.

Himiko exits offstage as Setsuko removes her shoes and returns to the tatami room and lights crossfade into Scene Two. . .

Act 1, Scene 2: Selecting Tea

SCENE TWO Selecting Tea

Lights up on the house where Atsuko stands wearing an apron over her clothing. Teruko sits at the table arranging three tins of tea, a porcelain tea pot, and the tea cups. Setsuko sorts through the trunk, removing such things as a photo album, materials, and green and purple crocheted poodle toilet paper covers. A tea kettle whistles loudly from the offstage kitchen. The noise jars everyone.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*to the offstage Chiz*)

Chizuye-san. What kind of tea would you like?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I'm looking for coffee. Isn't there any coffee around here?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*gets up, prepared to go*)

I'll go to the store and buy some for her.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Why do we need to waste time with that? There's tea.

SETSUKO BANKS

She just wants coffee. She's tired.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She just wants to have coffee because we're having tea. She even brought egg pie. Ugh.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I like egg pie.

(*on a look from Atsuko*)

Sometimes.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*enters holding up a jar triumphantly*)

Instant coffee! What will we Americans think of next?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Did you learn that at English class?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Why? You want to go to class with me, Ats?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*interested*)

What do you learn there?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

English.

(*a beat; smiling*)

You should learn English.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She knows English!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I mean real English.

(*to Teruko*)

Ever seen *My Fair Lady*?

(*Teruko's face is blank.*)

You know Audrey Hepburn?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yes! Yes! *Breakfast at Tiffany*!

(*a beat; excitedly but with surprise*)

She goes to English class, too?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

No, no, no. But in *My Fair Lady*, she starts out like you and ends up like me.

Chiz laughs, something Atsuko doesn't appreciate. Atsuko gets back to the matter at hand by tapping a spoon on the side of a tea cup.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

We have plain green tea, roasted rice tea, and just a little premium green tea.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Plain tea, please.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Plain tea?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

It's peasant tea, Teruko.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I like it.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

You have such simple tastes.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Makes life easier, yo.

SETSUKO BANKS

Well, roasted rice tea is fine.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I like premium.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Of course.

SETSUKO BANKS

We'll let Atsuko choose.

Teruko starts to open the premium tin, but Atsuko pulls out a pretty tea tin from her bag and smiles like a reigning queen.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I brought my own! Shall I treat you?

(*Everyone but Chiz nods*.)

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Once in a while I still drink green tea, but I choose my drink like I chose my husband: strong, dark, and with a lot of sugar.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*extremely offended*)

Really, Chizuye-san!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Aw, loosen up, Ats!

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*repulsed*)

Did your husband teach you to talk like that?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*ready to take her to the mat*)

You don't know anything about my husband.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*leaps into the conflict to avoid confrontation, hands each woman a plate of food*)

Well . . . what do you think our husbands thought about us when they met us?

The other women look at Teruko with accustomed strangeness. Chiz isn't quite ready to relinquish her fight, but does so out of respect for Teruko and Setsuko.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I mean, there they were, in a strange land full of people they had never seen before. We were eighteen or nineteen, didn't speak too much English. Why do you really think they wanted to marry us?

SETSUKO BANKS

For the same reason we wanted to marry them. We were young and we fell in love. So many of us.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I don't think there were that many.

SETSUKO BANKS

Oh yes. My daughter read that over one hundred thousand of us married Amerikans after World War II.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

That many?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*with her customary amusing innocence*)

That's a lot of love!

As the lights fade out on the house, Himiko, without sunglasses, enters and comes downstage center. She wears a pretty, youthful kimono. A light fades up on her and the song, "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else But Me," fades in to mark the postwar era in Japan. The other women drift downstage and occupy various background positions of the stage as they don pretty kimonos as well. Note: special kimono can be built with obi already attached.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

War's over. Strange-looking tall men with big noses and loud mouths are running our country. Our new supreme commander is called MacArthur, the great military saviour who will preserve our ravaged nation, . . . but who cannot preserve the common soul.

(*a beat*)

Last night, coming home from a wedding, I see my mother in her best kimono walking by the river. She takes off her geta and puts her feet in the water. Her face is peaceful. So lovely, like the moon in the shadows of the clouds. She slips her small hand into the river and picks up a large stone. Looking at it for only a moment, she drops it in her kimono sleeve. Suddenly, she begins filling both sleeves with stones. I try to stop her, but she fights. The same stones I played with as a child sagging in her kimono sleeves, she jumps into the currents. I watch her sink, her long black hair swirling around her neck like a silk noose. Her white face, a fragile lily; the river, a *taifun*. I wondered what it felt like to be a flower in a storm.

"The Wedding March" strikes up and the women move as if in an American ceremony toward center stage, all formally except for Himiko. All come downstage center looking outward, their expressions a varied repertoire. Setsuko smiles confidently. Teruko is meek, but decided. Himiko is arrogant. Atsuko smiles uncertainly. Chiz stands and joins them. The music rises to an uncomfortable pitch and ceases. Though facing the audience, the women share experiences happily as if stripped of inhibitions. Their demeanor and carriage reflect their youth.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*a pert, cute bow*)

I come from Fukuoka.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*an elegant, formal bow*)

Me, from the great port city of Kobe.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*a quick, crisp bow*)

Yokohama.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*an official bow*)

Nagoya.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And me from the capital of the magnificent Empire of Japan: Tokyo.

(*she bows, flipping her hair back*)

Lights widen. The women relax and take staggered positions. The lights focus from one to one.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

We live in a small house next to my father's lumber business. I'm hanging clothes to dry as the white Yankee walks by. He says, "Why, hello, sugar pie!

(*pronounced "shuga pie"*)

Ain't you the purtiest thing!" I say no. He says yes. I say okay.

SETSUKO BANKS

And Father says, "Don't look at them! They'll rape you." He even confided to me they had tails. But on the way home from dressmaking school, the Yankee soldier's helmet falls off at my feet. What can I do? I give it back to him. For the first time, I look into the gentle eyes of a man the color of — soy sauce!

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*removes a fan from her kimono sleeve and uses it girlishly*)

Coming home from countryside to visit my aunt, I stop at market. Suddenly . . . there he is! A Japanese man in Amerikan uniform from California. He speaks bad Japanese. Sounds cute! He wants to give me a ride.

(*sharply slaps the fan closed against her leg*)

But I can hear my mother:

(*speaks as if she's become her mother, an adamant and proud Japanese*)

"Japanese Amerikans not Japanese anymore! They speak loud and marry foreigners. They don't even take a bath every night."

(*again, the fan opens and moves girlishly*)

He looked clean! But I say to soldier, "Sorry. No thank you, sir."

(*bragging with joy*)

He followed me all the way to the train station!

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It's tough in Tokyo after the Yankees take our country. I have six sisters. My father screams about all the daughters my mother left him with. "Too crowded, no money." If I want a new dress, I have to work for it. There is this cabaret. My girlfriend says let's go be dancers. I think she means onstage. Like movies, dancing in pretty dresses while people watch and clap. I find out too late it means dancing with Amerikans. Fifty yen-a-dance.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

My mother died when I was born so it's always just Father and me. His best friend runs a restaurant that's pretty popular after the war with all the Amerikan boys. The first time I see Gustavo is there. Father and his friend — and his friend's marriage-hungry son — have me surrounded on all sides. But what they don't have covered is my heart.

All exit except for Teruko and Chiz. Music — "Tokyo Boogie Woogie" — sets the postwar mood in Japan again. Chiz immediatelyassumes the persona of an older, intrusive matchmaker. She stands behind the effervescent Teruko as if sneaking up on her.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Nineteen forty-seven. The business is picking up. We hold the yearly national barber competition and I win! First woman to win! Since the day he walked by my house, Master Sergeant Curtis MacKenzie comes to our barber shop again and again. He comes too much! Soon he will have no hair left!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Excuse me.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yes.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

That Amerikan. That nice-looking Texas man over there? He wants to take you to a movie. He's very nice. I cut his hair every week.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Explain to him.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Come on, Teru-chan, give him a chance. One little date. I won't tell anybody.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Tell him I can't be seen with a Yankee.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

He said he will take you and a girlfriend to a movie. In fact, he said he will take everyone at the barber shop to a movie.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

What? The four of us plus the three girls in back?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Yes. If that's what it takes to get a date with you.

(*Chiz disappears in the darkness*.)

TERUKO MAKENZIE

We walk on opposite sides of the street. Seven women on one side; you on the other. At the movie house, as if by chance, we sit next to each other. For a year, we go just like that, every week. Maybe fifty movies. Seven women. You spend a lot of yen, ne, just to get to know this silly country girl.

Blackout on Teruko; simultaneous spotlight goes up on Himiko who dances romantically to a slow American 1940s rhythm-and-blues song.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It was simple; it was a job. "Good evening. Welcome, welcome. Fifty yen. Do you want a dance, soldier?"

(*mimicks taking money and stands in surprise*)

Five hundred yen! No, no. Too much. Take it back, please.

(*offers it back*)

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*immediately appears and stands close to Himiko; the persona of the matchmaker continues, but in the style of a dykish, dance hall madam*)

Girl-san. That Yankee soldier over there. He wants to take you to dinner.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I don't leave with customers.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Ah, but one date won't hurt, will it, Himiko-san? No one has to know.

(*touches Himiko sexually, who is taken aback by this*)

After all, like he says, this is a dance hall.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Yes. That is exactly what we do and all that we do — dance.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

You'll never get anywhere thinking like that.

(*Chiz disappears in the darkness*.)

HIMIKO HAMILTON

His name was Billy, a cute white boy from Oklahoma. He came back every week and danced only with me. Never said too much, but he brought me flowers every time. He taught me how to do the "lindy hop,"

(*she begins dancing and twirls around, finally stopping full of laughter; it settles into a smile*)

. . . among other things.

(*a beat*)

It was my first time.

(*a beat*)

There was a teacher. Japanese. He taught at a university at Aoyama. He liked me. Truly. I was going to marry him. Good family. But I can't tell him I wasn't working at the trading company as an operator anymore. I can't tell him I am no longer respectable. So I just say I am sorry. I say my family won't accept the marriage. And I go back to the cabaret and wait for Billy.

Blackout on Himiko; spotlight on Atsuko and Setsuko, unaware of each other's presence. They come forward.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

We are shopping at the market.

SETSUKO BANKS

We are waiting for a train.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Mr˙ Kazuhiro Yamamoto, the Californian, is buying fish. So cute his face. He says, "Buy. Fish. This one.

(*indicates fish*)

Kore," and looks at me for help with his Japanese — as the shop-keeper laughs and overcharges him! I say it's wrong to cheat him and protect my *Japanese* Amerikan fiancé.

SETSUKO BANKS

It begins to rain, Will the color of his skin wash off? I watch his wrist and wait, but

(*to her pleasure*)

it stays brown. He is a "military policeman" with great power. But he has gentle eyes; I don't know how he could have killed in the war.

(*a beat*)

Most of my girlfriends who married Amerikans are long gone. Creed goes, too, but we write — my bad English and his bad Japanese. He gets stationed in Tokyo after Korean war and, for five years, we date while I care for my mother. One August, I hold her and she dies in my arms. My bond with Japan gone, I can now leave.

(*a beat as she smiles*)

Creed and I marry. He says it's not like Dick and Jane getting hitched in Peoria.

The women address the unseen presences of their husbands.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

You are so white, like a ghost, ne. How can I be sure you will never look at another woman? I hear you have many yellow-haired girls in Amerika. How can I be sure my black hair and different eyes will still be what you want?

SETSUKO BANKS

You say we may live the Japanese way wherever we go. I can't give up being Japanese even in your Amerika. This war drove my father to take his life. I gave up enough. I want peace.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, you look Japanese. It isn't like marrying a real Yankee. Well, it isn't!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

You keep telling me you're Mexican and that life isn't always easy in Amerika. I'm not sure what that means, but you have taught me this word "love" and I think that's what I feel for you. Life is short, Gustavo, and I have never felt like such a woman before. Take me with you. Hurry, before I see the tears in my father's eyes.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

My father doesn't want me to show my face at home again. "Look at your big belly," he shouts, "carrying Yankee-gaijin baby. Shame. Shame." Billy, you have to take me to Amerika now. There's no life left for me in Japan. People whisper "whore" in the streets and spit at my feet. You brought the war into my heart.

(*a beat, as if getting married*)

Yes. I do. Until death do us part.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

They are taller.

SETSUKO BANKS

And kinder.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

And cleaner.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And richer.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Our men have lost their spirit.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

It is hard after the war.

SETSUKO BANKS

We will soon be twenty.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Soon too old for marriage.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I am tired of living in the Tokyo the Yankees left us with.

They look outward and begin removing their kimono to reveal their original outfits underneath. They put the kimono away.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Father, forgive me. I should be here to take care of you when you're old.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Mother, please, stop crying. I'm not crazy. I love him.

SETSUKO BANKS

Dear mother, thank you for your blessing of Creed and me.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

My parents stop talking to me. I can't help it. He's the one I want to spend my life with. Forgive me.

(*bows low*)

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Goodbye Father. . .

(*regret and sadness*)

. . . sisters. You shall never see me again.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Father weeps like a grandmother. "Write me, Chizu-chan!" he cries. "If you don't like it there, let me know and I'll come and get you myself." "Sayonara," he says, addressing me like a son. And I depart, my heart divided between two men like a dark, shameful canyon.

SETSUKO BANKS

We are a casualty the Japanese do not care to count.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Excess baggage Amerika does not want to carry.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

And so the country watches as thousands of us leave Japan behind.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

And it aches.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And it cries.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

And it hopes we will not be lucky.

SETSUKO BANKS

Or brave.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Or accepted.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Or rich.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

But between the hate they have for us.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

The disdain.

SETSUKO BANKS

The contempt.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

There is a private envy.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Silent jealousy.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Longing.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Yes.

SETSUKO BANKS

They want to wear our shoes.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Leave Japan and their war-ragged lives behind.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Because the mess finally seems too much to clean.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And Japan finally looks as small as it really is.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

The war makes them see Japan is not the strongest or best.

SETSUKO BANKS

It makes us see — just once — beyond our tiny country and our tiny minds.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*salutes, mocking an American army officer in a booming voice*)

"Attention!"

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

"All wives of American military personnel must wear pants on board ship during the entire fifteen-day journey."

HIMIKO HAMILTON

"Attention, all wives of American military personnel, socks and shoes must be worn at all times."

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

"I repeat socks *and* shoes."

SETSUKO BANKS

"Husbands and wives will be confined to separate sleeping quarters."

TERUKO MAKENZIE

"That's all."

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*as herself, quietly*)

For now.

A single spotlight of interrogation grows tight, center stage, as the women are drawn to it as if by mandate. All crowd together and stand at attention. Himiko is less serious than the others. Teruko, unsure, follows Atsuko's movement and attitude. The women clear their throats. As they speak, they exchange looks which indicate unsure commitment to or a lack of understanding of the words. Setsuko and Atsuko raise their right hands. Teruko raises her left and then changes to her right, following Atsuko's example. Atsuko glances at Himiko who, with great boredom, raises her right hand. Only Chiz is confident, and she says the words well and with command.

WOMEN

(*in unison; with difficulty, stumbling over various words as this is the first time they have seen or read these words; some can say almost none of the words*)

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely renounce all allegiance to any foreign state or sovereignty of which I have heretofore been a citizen; that I will defend laws of United States of Amerika against all enemies; that I will bear arms on behalf of United States; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation: So help me God."

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*with pride and a sense of great accomplishment*)

That's it.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

What? Did anybody understand any of that?

SETSUKO BANKS

Defend against all enemies? Aren't we enemy?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Yes. Bear arms?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*nodding at Atsuko for confirmation*)

Freely?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Without *any* mental reservation!

SETSUKO BANKS

So help me. . .

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

God?

Chiz sings "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and enjoins the others to sing along. Teruko is willing and joins in. They hold hands and smile and sing with joy. Setsuko softly sings the Japanese national anthem, "Kimi Ga Yo." Atsuko, after studying Chiz's choice for a brief moment, joins Setsuko and sings. But, as Himiko begins singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee" in a jarring, life-or-death manner, the women all grow quiet and sing the final lyrics with her, but with altered words. They sing with a sense of fear.

WOMEN

"Land where our souls will die. Land of our children's pride. From every mountainside, let freedom ring."

Crossfade to Scene Three as Chiz, Teruko, Atsuko and Setsuko return to the tatami and lights fade up. Himiko moves to side stage and observes.

Act 1, Scene 3: Serving Tea

SCENE THREE Serving Tea

Atsuko pours tea as the others begin to examine the trunk's contents.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*holds up her coffee cup*)

Here's to fairy tales — and the dust they become.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*to audience, insistently*)

No, no, they must drink for hope.

Setsuko, Teruko, and Atsuko lift their tea cups and sip. Teruko reacts if she burned her tongue.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

A-cha-cha-cha-cha!

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Don't drink so fast, ne. Burn your mouth.

(*tastes it*)

It's not hot at all.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It's hard to find the perfect temperature.

SETSUKO BANKS

It's fine. I like it this way, too.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Funny. You two like your tea the same way, your daughters are best friends, your husbands used to go hunting together — and you two probably haven't said a dozen words to each other over the last fifteen years. Is this the first time you've ever had tea together?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It is, isn't it, Setsuko-san?

SETSUKO BANKS

I'm busy with my family. And I have so much sewing to do.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

What is your excuse, Atsuko-san?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I keep busy with the church.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And Teruko?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I try to visit everyone, but I like to play Bingo with my sugar pie. And, you know, three times a year we go to Las Vegas.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I don't have time either. After Gustavo left the army, we spent all our time together. Then . . . he was gone and, well, I started classes.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Everyone has an alibi for silence.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*smiles at the women to tease them*)

Besides, no one ever invited me to take tea but Setsuko.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I thought you didn't like tea.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Don't hand me that bull, Ats. You know damn well you didn't want me in your house because my husband was Mexican.

(*slowly without hostility as she moves from woman to woman*)

Atsuko believes she's the only pure soul left. But, Ats, I have to tell you,. . . you have no soul.

(*Atsuko, taken aback, gets up and moves away. Chiz stands and walks toward her*.)

Don't worry — I don't either.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Chizuye-san!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

And, Teruko, you think your white husband buys you a position in town society, but, deep down at heart, you're still a "Jap" to them and you always will be.

(*Setsuko looks away*)

Setsuko, you live like a social worker. You've had to deal with so much prejudice you don't want *any*body else to feel pain.

SETSUKO BANKS

I enjoy taking tea. With any of you.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

My husband doesn't like when we speak Japanese. He says it sounds like silverware dropping. So it's better if I take tea at someone else's home.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, I'm not ashamed to say it: I only take tea with my very best friends.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Which is to say you don't take it very often.

(*Atsuko boldly faces Chiz, who does not back off*.)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Chizuye, there's no reason to spite me because my husband is Japanese Amerikan.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*laughs*)

Do you think I have any respect for Japanese Amerikans?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*quickly, adamant*)

They're our people. My husband's parents died in a concentration camp in the California desert, just because they were Japanese.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

They're not "our" people. They hate us more than Amerikans because we remind them of what they don't want to be anymore. They made a choice; most of us haven't. They don't like you either, Ats, because you're a "war bride."

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*indignant*)

I'm not a war bride. I didn't marry the war.

SETSUKO BANKS

Maybe we did.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

And then we came here — to Kansas. Not quite the fairy tale ending you ordered, eh, Ats?

As Chiz laughs gruffly and darkly, the truth of this statement jars them. Clouded with discomfort, they lift their tea cups and drink, except for Chiz who stares off into the distance. Lights fade out on the tatami area. Downstage center, a spotlight fades up on Himiko. She wears her black sunglasses. A typically 1950s Kansas song — "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?" — fades in as Himiko pirouettes and then speaks in the manner of a carnival barker. In the background in dim light, the others kneel as if just having arrived in Kansas. When Himiko addresses them, they smile, unaware that they are the joke.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

"Welcome, welcome, to the Land of Milk and Honey, the Bible Belt; the land of great, wide plains and

(*with pride*)

narrow minds. On behalf of the tourism bureau, we'd like to welcome you to Kansas, the Sunflower State. We know all about you people. We read the magazines. We saw the cartoons. We saw *Sayonara*.

Himiko bows ridiculously and the women respond sincerely with bows; Himiko returns to her own persona.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It was more than racism. It was the gloating of victor over enemy. It was curiosity about our yellow skin, about why in the hell their red-blooded Amerikan boys would want to bring home an "Oriental."

(*she indicates the other women*)

Some of them liked us; most of them didn't.

(*exits; the music fades out, and the others move downstage*.)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Tell me, miss, do you have a Japanese restaurant here? I want to surprise my husband. No Japanese restaurant? *Ara*! What kind of restaurant do you have? Steak? Barbecue?

(*pronounced bah-bee-q*)

What is barbecue?

SETSUKO BANKS

Excuse me. We are looking for a hotel. What? Inter-racial couple? What does that mean? You reserve the right to refuse service? But what did we do wrong? My husband works for your government. We just need a place to stay for the night. I *am* speaking English!

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*fearfully*)

Please stop staring at me like I am an animal. I just want to buy groceries.

(*less fearfully*)

What? You want to be my friend? Oh, how . . . how nice!

(*She mimicks shaking the person's hand, something she finds strange. She bows at the same time and then, uncomfortable, draws her hand back without malice*.)

You have such beautiful yellow hair. Like the color of Japanese pickles!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*determinedly and to the point*)

Listen, lady, you give me a hard time about opening a checking account just because I'm Japanese, and I'll give you more hell than you bargained for. I'm an American citizen now.

(*but she slightly mispronounces the word "citizen"*)

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I miss sashimi!

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

It would be nice to bite into o-manju.

SETSUKO BANKS

I can taste the crisp nashi.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Sasa-dango.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Kushi-dango.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Hot oden.

SETSUKO BANKS

Kaki. There's nothing like Japanese persimmons.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

He never told me there would be no Japanese food.

SETSUKO BANKS

He never told me about "we reserve the right."

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I never thought he would die and leave me here to be an American without him.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I never thought they would be scared of us, too.

The shrill whistle of a tea kettle blasts through the air, bringing the women back to the tatami room. Himiko enters and drifts. Periodically, she rests and rubs her feet as if they are sore.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

More tea.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*to audience*)

Yes. Please. They *must* keep drinking.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

You didn't mix up the tea cups, did you?

The women react to Atsuko's idiosyncrasy.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I think this one is mine.

SETSUKO BANKS

This one is mine.

Teruko serves fresh tea to everyone and Teruko freshens Chiz's coffee.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Now, Ats, take it easy.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

She talks just like the women at the grocery store.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yes, but she gets through the checkout line faster than any of us, too.

SETSUKO BANKS

She's always adapted faster than us.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

So, ne, I could never even get used to Amerikan bed. In Japan, I always sleep right on the edge of the blankets so my nose could smell the sweet straw of the matting. I come to Amerika and every night for months I fall out of bed!

SETSUKO BANKS

One day — I am so embarrassed — Creed sees me in the bathroom. He says, "Setsuko! You're standing on the toilet! Sit down." So I sit — facing the wall. Next time, he laughs and says, "Honey, you're sitting on it backwards. Turn around."

TERUKO MAKENZIE

You know this car wash on Sixth Street? I want to surprise my sugar pie by washing the car for him. So I drive through about twenty-five miles an hour! The machines scrape the car. When I come out of there, there are bumps all over and I tell that manager he better pay me for the damage. He just laughs and calls my husband.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*looks at the placid Chiz*)

Was it always so easy for you?

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Well, I live *here*. I make the best of it.

SETSUKO BANKS

Japan. Amerika. Maybe it doesn't matter where we go. Back home, country papa-san says to me when my first is born, "Bring *it* here for me to see." He wants to see how ugly she is. But she is pretty, and the Japanese crowd and stare. She doesn't look Japanese, they say, and she doesn't look Negro. And I am glad because I have created something new, something that will look new and think new.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*a chuckle which she knows will irritate Atsuko*)

Hybrid Japanese.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Mixed Japanese kids at school are very smart. Teachers say they've never seen anything like it.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

That's only because they're half Japanese.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Ats, may your daughter marry a Mexican.

Atsuko almost chokes on her tea at this remark.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Japanese Mexican girls are pretty.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

I don't expect Chizuye to understand the importance of being Japanese.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Oh, Teri's

(*notes Teruko*)

all right because her daughter came out looking Japanese. Buddha was good to her for chanting all these years.

(*rubs her hands together to make fun of chanting*)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

At least none of our girls turned out like Mieko Hamilton.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

But they are like Mieko. They're between two worlds. We put them there.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Mieko was just like her mother.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Yes. And like her father.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Himiko was crazy and she drove her husband crazy.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

And I think you're crazy, so it's all relative, Ats.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

It's nice to be together again, ne.

Crossfade lights from tatami to downstage center as women march quietly in military formation to a period military song and drumbeat. Himiko comes center stage.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Our husbands didn't know what they were getting into. They brought us to Kansas: their Japanese wives dressed up in Amerikan clothes. We were little, breakable dolls to them. I don't think they ever really understood us, but they loved us. Even when the memories of the war crashed through their heads like an endless nightmare, they tried hard to keep on living like normal people and to be the husbands they had dreamed about being when they laid their lives on the line for their country.

As the women file into place and stand at attention, Himiko joins them. They appear rigid, stoic with the carriage of men. Setsuko breaks line and takes on the persona of a gentle, urban Negro.

SETSUKO BANKS

Uh, Baby-san, why are you staring at the washing machine? The clothes should have been done an hour ago. Yes, I said you don't have to do a thing. Yes, I promised it's all automatic. But, honey, even when it's automatic, you have to push the button to turn it on.

Setsuko falls back into formation. Atsuko takes on the persona of a mellow, California nisei and steps forward.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Hey, Atsuko, where'd you put my hammer? I gotta finish these shelves and I know you never put it back when you use it. Now don't get upset. I'm not trying to say you don't ever do anything right. I just want my hammer. Are you on the rag or what?

(*the imaginary hammer comes flying through the air and he barely catches it*)

Okay, okay. Sorry. I didn't mean it. Aw, honey, please don't make me sleep on the couch.

(*apparently, Atsuko has hit him on the head*)

Atsuko falls back into line. Chiz falls out.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Hey, Chizuye. I'm happy you've learned to cook Mexican food, but can you cook some Japanese food for me? The paella is fine, but I love Japanese food. What do you say you teach me how to make yaki-soba?

Chiz falls back into line. Teruko breaks line and takes on the persona of a robust, swaggering Texan.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

You did *what* to the car at the car wash? Shit, Teri, ain't you got any sense in that little Japanese head of yours? You don't drive *through* the car wash. You just sit in the damn car and let the machines roll the car. I'll be damned, my new car lit'rally gone down the drain.

(*reacts to a crying Teruko, softens*)

Now, honey, don't cry. We'll just have to get the car fixed.

(*falls back into formation*)

Again.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*falls out of formation with the persona of a scrappy Oklahoman with an edgy, rural voice*)

Himi, I didn't stay out late. I told you. I was fishing with Kaz Yamamoto. Okay, okay, so I fished all night and only brought home two fish. What can I say? I'm a bad fisherman. You want to go out for ice cream? There's a Peter Pan store right up the street. I'll get you some Oregon blackberry. I'll bet you never had that flavor before. What? Wait a minute, these ain't frozen fillets from the grocery store. Shut up before I knock your fuckin' teeth in, you hear me, Himi?

Himi falls back into formation. The "men" break line and ad lib hearty greetings. Two go through the motions of cleaning and loading rifles; two open the beers and mimic drinking. Campsite activity ensues.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Yo, beer.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Yeah.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Ain't nothin' like a huntin' trip to clear out the lungs, ain't it, boys?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Kinda like shooting at Japs again.

(*men look at him*)

Oooooooops. I didn't mean it that way. Y'all know how it was during the war, "do this to the Japs," "do that to the Japs." Sorry. Slip of the tongue. 'Course mine always has been kinda swingin' on a loose hinge.

(*as he pats Atsuko on the shoulder*)

I mean, you know I got a good heart.

(*he turns and mimics shooting a basket*)

Two points.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*he takes his turn at shooting, makes the basket and ad libs victory*)

My friends said I married one of my own kind. Uh-uh. I spent my life trying to be American, not Japanese American. Being American was better.

Atsuko and Setsuko exchange a handshake of fraternity.

SETSUKO BANKS

I grew up hard in New York. I had chicks throwing a lot of fast words and a lot of fast ass in my face for years. When I met Setsuko, I knew I could live the quiet life I love, and she'd be right there with me. Forever.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Before World War II, I never dated anything but white tomatoes. When I laid my eyes on Teri, I said to myself, "Fella, you are just about to cross the big boundary line." And I crossed it and there ain't a yellow rose in all of Texas who'll ever turn my heart like her.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*he shoots a basket and misses; the other "men" kid him*)

I never even saw a Japanese until the war. I just fell in love with this strange girl. She happened to be Japanese, and she happened to be pretty ballsy and bright. She may be less Japanese now, but I think that's her way of survival. I hate to think what a loner I'd become without her, and vice versa.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*mimicks urinating with back turned to audience*)

Ats and I are a good example of opposites attracting, but she's the only person who calls me Kazuhiro . . . just like my mom used to.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Aw, well ain't that cute.

Teruko and Atsuko mimick tagging each other, shooting two baskets competitively.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Two points. Whoosh.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*joking*)

Wimp.

(*shoots and revels in victory*)

Teruko and Atsuko do a quick "Three Stooges" exchange.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Women. You can't live with 'em and —

HIMIKO HAMILTON

And you can't shoot 'em. Not anymore. Even though they're Japs.

(*dark, reverberating laughter that disturbs the other "men"*)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*approaches Himiko*)

Hamilton, I'm tired of hearing that word. What should I call you? White trash?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I'm the only real American here.

(*with pride*)

All-American mutt.

(*more somberly, threateningly to Atsuko*)

Fightin' Japs . . . marryin' Japs. Yellow skin and slit eyes. Just like the man in the jungle. Wanting me to die so he could live.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I remember the time your wife ran out of your house wearing a slip. She said you'd had a fight and you told her you wanted to kiss and make up.

(*a beat as the others relive this, too*)

And you kissed her, all right — and bit off part of her lip. They had to sew it back on.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

What can I say. There's nobody like her. Never has been.

(*a beat*)

Never will be. She's the only fuckin' prize I ever won.

The others eye him like a jury and Himiko laughs.

SETSUKO BANKS

What did you expect, Hamilton? You'd bring her home and she'd sprout blue eyes and whistle "Dixie"?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*anger simmering just under the surface and finally busting loose*)

Hey, what do you want me to do? Huh? She crawls under my fist like an orphan beggin' for love and my knuckles come down like a magnet. Like a fucking magnet, man. I got eight younger brothers and sisters and I lived in a trailer the size of a pencil box, working three jobs while you guys was jabbin' broads in the alley. Fuckin'-ay man, give me some room to breathe in.

Himiko spins away as lights blackout on the "men." Spotlight simultaneously fades up on Chiz, downstage left.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Gustavo always said, "Chiz, you're gonna love Kansas. It's real slow, I know, but we'll have a house and a business, and Mama's going to spoil you rotten." He was going to teach me how to build a snowman, our project for that first winter in Kansas. So the snow came and we waited. He said it had to be just the right wetness so we could pack it tightly, so we could make a snowman who would outlive all other snowmen. A *perfect* snowman. That afternoon, Mama Juarez and I were making cinnamon hot chocolate for when Gustavo came home. Snow was falling around the steaming window. The icy streets looked like a distorted mirror. And, somewhere where I couldn't hear him call, where he couldn't grab my hand for help, Gustavo was sliding into another world, thinking only of me as the ice cut into his beautiful face. The next day, the snow was perfect for building our snowman. But I didn't know how to build anything without Gustavo. And I told myself I would never not know how again.

(*a beat, a vow to herself*)

Perfect.

Setsuko enters the light and hovers over her.

SETSUKO BANKS

My youngest takes home economics. She taught me how to make cookies and milk. I'm almost done. The phone rings. "Mrs˙ Banks?" the army doctor says, "We regret to inform you Sergeant Banks passed away at fourteen hundred thirty-two hours." The nightmares of war had chased his heart away.

(*a pause*)

The girls come home, their sloe-shaped eyes full of the sun. I ask them if they want to go "home" — to Japan. Or to California, where there are more

(*smiles*)

"hybrid Japanese." They say they want to go with me. That I am home. And so, I have a family to raise and my house. I'm staying right here and I dare anyone to move me.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Setsuko.

Chiz holds onto her, a move that makes Setsuko uncomfortable at first but then becomes necessary for both of them.

SETSUKO BANKS

Yes.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*with unbitter puzzlement*)

It wasn't perfect.

SETSUKO BANKS

But at least it was. At least we had it. Once.

Lights dim on them with an immediate spotlight up on Himiko.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*with quiet, determined dignity without a shred of anger or self-pity*)

No, we didn't. We never had it. All we had filtering through our fists was the powder left when a dream explodes in your face and your soul is left charred with the memory of what could have been if there was no war, if there was never a drink to help him forget, never a place like this where our dignity was tied to a tree and left hanging for strangers to spit on.

Himiko exits as Chiz and Setsuko return to the tatami room and lights cross fade into Scene Four:

Act 1, Scene 4: Cold Tea

SCENE FOUR Cold Tea

The women reflect exhaustion and contemplation. They appear to be sitting closer, except for Atsuko, who is distant both physically and psychologically.

SETSUKO BANKS

The tea is cold.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, we must make a fresh pot.

(*exits to kitchen to do so*)

TERUKO MAKENZIE

We've been talking so much.

SETSUKO BANKS

Yes, things get cold when neglected.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*checks Atsuko's tea tin and calls out to Atsuko*)

We're out of your tea, Atsuko-san. May we drink "peasant" tea?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*from the kitchen*)

Have what you want.

(*Atsuko returns with fresh hot water for tea*.)

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I've been in Kansas so long, I don't know good tea from bad.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Oh, Teruko, come on. You've adjusted the best; you're an entrepreneur. You and Curt started from scratch; Japanese barber comes to Kansas.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Curtis wants to stay here. Maybe buy a farm. I think that's okay. Setchan, what about you? Do you think you'll marry again and stay here?

SETSUKO BANKS

If a nice man comes along . . . maybe. I will be fine.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

How many Kansas rednecks are there who can think of a Japanese as anything but a geisha or Tokyo Rose? Even the most beautiful Japanese in the world couldn't find a redneck for miles who'd see her as a real person.

(*a beat*)

I don't want to love again. It hurts too much when they go away.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, I suppose you all envy me, thinking I'm the lucky one.

(*the women react to her again*)

But my husband promised he'd leave the army and we'd move to California. He's still in the army and we're still here.

(*a beat*)

It's so unfair that I have to die in Kansas.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*tired of Atsuko's ridiculous fears*)

Atsuko-san, you're going to live a long time.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

So? What difference does it make? When we're dead, no one will remember there were Japanese in Kansas.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

What will happen to the last one? Who will bury her?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

When it comes down to it, we're alone. Just like Himiko. She died alone.

SETSUKO BANKS

But she's not alone now. I am with her.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Oh, spare me. She's dead. Who cares about death unless it's happening to you?

HIMIKO HAMILTON

They must care. If my journey leaves me stranded here, they, too, will have no passage.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

I am with Himiko-san, too.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Well, I'm not and I never was.

(*starts gathering her cup and goodies*)

In fact, I'm ready to go home. I've wasted my day and, let's face it, all the cleaning in the world isn't going to change Himiko's life or help her find a new life that's any better.

SETSUKO BANKS

Maybe it's really not Himiko's life you're worried about. Maybe it's yours, Atsuko-san.

Atsuko looks outward. Her eyes lock with Himiko's for a moment. Himiko bows her head toward her invitingly. Atsuko shakes her head as if she has seen something and then turns to the women again. She is uneasy and caustic.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Come on. Let's be honest. Since when has anyone really cared about Himiko Hamilton? We've always known she was crazy. Poor Teruko, you had to live in the same neighborhood as her. You couldn't even go into your front yard without her bothering you. Of course, Himiko was scared of Chizuye so she didn't bother her too much. She admired you, Chizuye. Yes. You had become a model Amerikan. She used to talk about your "perfect Amerikan" accent. Said you sounded just like a television star.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Atsuko, shut up before I lose my temper. I've been saving it up for you all these years, so if it gets loose. . .

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*gently, again trying to deter confrontation*)

It *was* Chizuye who finally came to check on Himiko when she disappeared. She found her here. Sleeping.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Dead. For at least three days. To think of it.

SETSUKO BANKS

No. She died many years ago. Of a broken heart.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Oh, you all make me laugh. Such tragedy in your eyes. I can just hear the shakuhachi playing in the background as you weep for her spirit.

SETSUKO BANKS

That's enough, Atsuko-san.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Enough what? Enough laughter for the joke the war played on my life? Enough tears for having no allegiance except what I practice in the silence of my soul? Excuse me for not being strong like you, Setsuko. We all have our own problems to worry about. Maybe you think you can bear the weight of the world, but I can't.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

What you can do for me is shut up. You've always been a mean, selfish bitch, Atsuko.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*quite taken aback, she tries to collect herself*)

Teruko let's go!

(*Teruko shakes her head firmly*)

Teruko!

TERUKO MAKENZIE

(*highly upset, the words spill out uncontrollably*)

Atsuko, I know you're afraid because the first of us is dead. Maybe you think soon we'll be having tea like this after you die. And maybe that is what will be. You can't control that. But you *can* control how you treat people.

SETSUKO BANKS

And the respect you owe the dead.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Oh, just leave me alone. I wish I'd never come here today.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

But we did, didn't we? Like the good Japanese ladies we are.

(*a beat*)

We're not here because we have to be. Japanese manners don't require us to pay homage to some loon of a woman, even if she *was* Japanese. No, we're here today because we hurt inside like we never have before. Because when the first of us goes so violently and it's all over the papers, it wakes us up. For the first time in our lives, we gather together all the pieces of our used-up hearts and come running here hoping we'll find some kind of miracle that will glue it all back together and send us into our old age with something to hold onto.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

But today we *have* all gone a little farther with each other than we ever have before.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Tomorrow it'll be status quo again.

SETSUKO BANKS

No, it won't ever be like it used to be again.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Speak for yourself.

(*a challenge, desperately trying to maintain the control she has always enjoyed over Teruko*)

Are you coming, Teruko?

(*She begins to move toward an exit; she is full of anger and suppressing tears. She turns once again to look at Teruko. Setsuko stands supportively behind Teruko. The words bite out of Atsuko's mouth*.)

Teruko. . .this is your last chance.

To her shock, Teruko even more firmly turns away. Devastated, Atsuko moves toward the door and then, defeated, falls to her knees; Himiko immediately comes to her side.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Atsuko-san, stay. If you leave now, no one will rest.

Himiko stands in front of Atsuko and, without touching her, helps her to stand and balance using her hands as delicate guides. Atsukofights with herself and then turns back to the women. She bows in apology to Teruko who bows back. She turns toward the door again, but Setsuko bows to her. Feeling better, Atsuko returns the bow. Still uncomfortable, Atsuko glances at Chiz who motions kindly for her to sit down. She does and the other women follow suit, except for Teruko.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

The only time we have taken tea together is whenever something bad happened to a Japanese "war bride." We have the best tea and realize how little we understand about each others' choices: in husbands, in raising our children, in whether or not we choose to embrace Amerika. Amerikans don't want us. Japanese Amerikans too busy feeling bad themselves. We can't go back to Japan. That's why I say family is the most important thing. What makes us the most happiest? Our children. Our children.

Chiz exits as lights crossfade to the tatami area and music — "Runaway" — fades up rapidly. The women dance onto the tatami area as young girls. The "girls" assume positions as if enjoying themselves at a slumber party: manicuring, Teruko rolling someone's hair, putting on cosmetics, etc˙ Atsuko mimicks smoking. The women are playing their daughters. They sing the "wa-wa-wa" lyrics of the song and burst into laughter.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Can you believe it? My mom won't let me go out for cheerleading. She said it's too "sexual."

(*imitates mother's accent*)

"Don't do skiing. Japanese don't ski. Don't do motorcycle. Don't do skydive." She even thinks life insurance guarantees you don't die. When I was born, she bought me a hundred thousand dollar policy.

SETSUKO BANKS

My mother worries about life, not death.

(*imitates mother's accent*)

"Did you eat your raw egg and fermented soy beans today? Did you have bowel movement?"

(*she laughs*)

Mom's so funny. We were separated in a store and, over the intercom, I heard: "Japanese mother lost in dry goods. Will her daughter please claim her?"

TERUKO MAKENZIE

My mother doesn't worry about anything except my dad. When she starts licking the bottom of his shoes and gets that look in her eye,

(*mimicks her mother doing this*)

I can say, "Mom, hi, I'm going to join the Marines, become a lesbian, screw the football team." She'd just say,

(*imitates mother's accent*)

"Okay, Linda. That's good. Have to fix dinner for sugar pie now."

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*does breast exercises*)

Man, the only thing that really bugs me after all these years is having to take my shoes off in the house.

SETSUKO BANKS

I thought I was going to die when my date picked me up for the homecoming dance. While he waited for me, my mother put shower caps over his shoes!

Except for Himiko, the "girls" laugh and ad lib sounds of embarrassment. Himiko is eerily silent.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Mieko, what about *your* mother?

(*Teruko can't help giggling, although she tries hard to suppress it. It is contagious*.)

She came to our house wearing that blonde wig. She slurped her tea and crocheted those green and purple poodle toilet paper covers. Ugh.

All but Himiko laugh nervously, unable to restrain themselves, despite Himiko's cold stare.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

(*without feeling, no sense of bitterness, with an eerie smile*)

I hate the world.

(*fresh laughter from the other "girls"*)

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

So take a number, Mieko.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

You guys don't know anything about what life really is. Life is about relationships. Relationships with guys.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Oh, Mieko. We all date guys.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

It isn't about dating guys. It's about being *fucked* by guys.

Their laughter is cut short by Himiko's remark. Whatever they are doing, their motions grind to a halt: Teruko in the middle of putting on lipstick, Atsuko in the middle of a laugh, and so on. They are shocked at this language and eye one another uncomfortably. Mieko seems to enjoy this power.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

In fact, it's about being fucked by everyone: your mother, your father — and even yourself.

(*a beat as she looks away from the girls and then she hits the table with the palm of her hand, frightening the other girls*)

Don't ask me about my mother. Because then you're asking me about myself. . .and I don't know who the hell I am.

She spins away from the other girls, moving to one side of the stage and folding herself into a ball and the other "girls" exit quickly. A light fades up on Himiko, now having reassumed the persona of Himiko, the spirit.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

I was born in a storm and it's never stopped raining. My only blessing is Mieko, my half-Japanese girl. I love her so much, but she was born in my storm, too. For years, I tried to talk to her, but she wasn't ready.

(*a sad laugh*)

Mieko is so fast, I only know what she looks like from behind. Because she's always leaving, her big Japanese *o-shiri* swaying like a flower, out looking for dreams she thinks men are going to give her. So it was a Saturday in May. Mieko wants to make me worry, so she *hitchhikes*. She's gone three days. Then the big policeman comes. "Do you have a daughter named Mieko? When's the last time you saw her, Mrs˙ Hamilton?"

(*breathes hard and fast; forces composure*)

The last time I saw Mieko is in the dusk. She looks so Japanese, her shoulders curving like gentle hills. "Perfect kimono shoulders," her grandmother would say.

(*a beat*)

Mieko came home today. Someone made her dirty, stabbed her in the chest many times and then raped her as she died. Left a broom inside my little girl's body. Her brassiere was shredded by the knife.

(*a beat*)

There is no one for me; there never was. Even my sisters of Japan cannot bless me with sandals to cover my blistered feet as I prepare for the longest journey.

(*looks around*)

Billy, is that you? Before it's too late, tell me the truth. You loved me, didn't you? Once. Once there was nobody like me. Now that I know, I can go on without you, Billy. I see you there, waiting in the mist, your strong arms ready to hold me for one last dance. But I'm going another way. Like bamboo, I sway back and forth in the wind, bending but never breaking. Never again. The war is over. Mother? Is that you? Are you waiting for me, too?

(*brief, absolute delight, addressing Mieko when she was five*)

Mieko-chan, I see you dancing in my best kimono: all light and laughter and . . . clean!

(*the delight fades*)

No, you all have to let me go now. I have a long walk ahead of me. All ties are unbound, as completely as if they never existed.

She exits as lights dim and we bridge into the next scene. Wind chimes tinkle in the darkness:

Act 1, Scene 5: Perfect Drinking Temperature

SCENE FIVE Perfect Drinking Temperature

SETSUKO, ATSUKO, CHIZ, TERUKO

(*from various corners of the stage, they chant in the style of Buddhist chanting; in English the ancient poem means:* "I don't care / What anybody says / I will never stop / Loving you.")

Hito wa dono yo ni, i oo to mamayo.

SETSUKO BANKS

Tsunor'ya

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

. . . suru to mo. . .

TERUKO MAKENZIE

. . . yami. . .

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

. . . wa senu.

SETSUKO BANKS

Hito wa dono yo ni. . .

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

. . . i oo to mamayo. . .

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Tsunor'ya suru to mo. . .

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Yami wa senu.

SETSUKO BANKS

Himi-chan.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Himiko.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Himiko-san.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Searching.

SETSUKO BANKS

For peace

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Finally free.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Himiko-san.

As if drawn to the power of their harmony, Himiko enters dressed in resplendent kimono. She moves gracefully, winsomely, and comes center stage as the chanting continues.

SETSUKO BANKS

Your sisters call.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Come.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Come unto us.

ALL

Come to tea with us.

They study each other thoughtfully and then surround Himiko with warmth. Himiko kneels before them, facing the audience and bows her head low.

ALL

(*a whisper*)

Gan'batte.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*a whisper in the shadow of "gan'batte"*)

Persevere.

The women return to the tatami room, wind chimes marking the transition. Himiko follows and watches them.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

I am glad I came here today. Somehow, I feel at home with you women, you Japanese women.

(*smiles*)

Today.

SETSUKO BANKS

We should have let anyone who wanted to help come over. Today, even taking tea is different.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

Yes, even tea tastes different.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Maybe we will have tea again. All of us?

SETSUKO BANKS

Yes, Chizuye-san. Soon.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

As you wish it.

SETSUKO BANKS

Atsuko-san?

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

(*looks around the room as if she senses a ghost; answers slowly*)

Yes?

(*a frightened beat*)

Himiko is here, isn't she?

TERUKO MAKENZIE

Oh, please, you're scaring me. Let's not talk about ghosts.

ATSUKO YAMAMOTO

But maybe that's the fate that awaits us all. A black space where the war dead and us, the war wounded, must

sit out eternity.

SETSUKO BANKS

If it is our destiny, then —

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

Then it is our destiny.

TERUKO MAKENZIE

So, ne.

SETSUKO BANKS

(*The women look solemnly at one another as Setsuko bows in honor of Himiko*)

Okagesama de.

CHIZUYE JUAREZ

(*takes a cup for Himiko and acknowledges her*)

In your honorable shadow.

(*Chiz puts a fifth cup on the table*.)

Please join us for tea.

The women sit for a last drink of tea. Himiko joins them. They lift their cups simultaneously and slightly bow their heads to one another. Himiko forms a cup with her hands and drinks from it in unison with the others. She looks happier.

HIMIKO HAMILTON

Perfect.

The minute that word is uttered, the women pack up their things, ad lib farewells in Japanese — "sa," "ikimasho, ne," "mata, ne," "ato de denwa shimasu," etc ˙ — except for Chiz. She is the last to speak and says "bye-bye" and Teruko responds with "bye-bye." They exit in different directions. Setsuko lingers as if trying to absorb Himiko's energy from the air. She bows deeply. Then she, too, exits as traditional Japanese music fades up. Taking each cup of tea and bowing to the woman who left the tea before, Himiko pours the remnants into her cup. She gathers strength from this and moves downstage center where she kneels. Holding the cup outward, she bows gracefully to the audience and then drinks the tea with extreme thirst that appears to be satisfied from the drink. She sets the cup down in front of her and smiles a half-smile, perhaps like that of Mona Lisa, to the audience. She bows low, all the way to the floor. Black out.

THE END